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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000392

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT CHEN AVOIDS FURTHER CONTROVERSY IN HIS  
FEBRUARY 7 REMARKS

REF: TAIPEI 382

Classified By: AIT Acting Director David Davison,  
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In brief remarks to a Tainan County Compatriots Association on February 7, President Chen did not repeat the controversial proposals to consider abolishing the National Unification Council (NUC) and National Unification Guidelines (NUG), using the name Taiwan in applying to join the UN, and holding a constitutional referendum that he announced in his Chinese New Year speech in Tainan County January 29 (Reftel). However, in discussing his views on the cross-strait issue, Chen alluded to the National Unification Guidelines, noting the anniversary of the NUG and suggesting that having unification as a preset outcome is an undesirable restriction of the right of free choice of the Taiwan people.

In his new speech, Chen also stressed the need to persevere despite difficulties, a possible reference to the opposition he has encountered following his January 29 proposals. Although Chen discussed the PRC military threat in his new speech, he did not repeat his subordinates' arguments that the PRC has changed the status quo and that therefore Taiwan should not be bound by its previous commitments. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) President Chen on February 7 explained his recent political thinking in a brief address at a Chinese New Year reception hosted by the Tainan County Compatriots Association of Taipei City. Chen did not mention the possible abolition of the National Unification Council (NUC) and National Unification Guidelines (NUG) but did note that March 24 will be the fifteenth anniversary of the passage of the NUG and the first anniversary of China's passage of the Anti-Seccession Law (ASL). Chen also noted that March will be the tenth anniversary of the Taiwan Strait missile crisis and that one million Taiwanese marched for "democracy, peace, and to protect Taiwan," and against China's ASL, on March 26 last year.

¶3. (SBU) Chen discussed three political topics in his speech: the PRC military threat, protecting the right of the Taiwan people to decide their own future without precondition, and the need to persevere despite difficulties. In the section of his speech on the PRC military threat, Chen noted that the U.S. had asked China to take corrective

actions to make up for negative effects caused by the passage of the ASL. However, Chen said, over the past year, China's "corrective actions" have been to further divide and destroy Taiwan's unity and to increase missile deployments. After discussing the military threat, including reference to the U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review, Chen concluded this section by saying, "The United States is not just concerned about Taiwan's security, but even more worried that the cross-Strait military advantage is gradually tilting toward China."

¶4. (SBU) In the next section of the speech, Chen noted that his mission and responsibility as president is to protect Taiwan's national security. He reminded the people of Taiwan that they need to have a sense of crisis, distinguish between friends and enemies, and especially not ignore the dangers that could come following passage of the ASL. Kuomintang (KMT) Chairman Ma Ying-jeou's statement to foreign media in January that the KMT's ultimate goal is unification seriously violates the spirit of sovereignty residing in the people, Chen argued, because the democratic spirit is that the people are the masters. Only the 23 million people of Taiwan have the right to decide Taiwan's future. All preconditions or preset conclusions about unification between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait serve to bind or restrict the Taiwan people's right of free choice. National sovereignty cannot be divided or shared, Chen argued, adding that Taiwan's national sovereignty absolutely cannot be jointly shared with China's 1.3 billion people.

¶5. (SBU) In the final section, Chen compared Taiwan to a train going through a tunnel. Although many people may become anxious or afraid because of darkness when halfway

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through the tunnel, if the train keeps moving forward, light and hope will reappear when the exit is reached. No matter how bad or unfavorable the environment, if the Taiwan people are unified, they will be able resolutely to achieve their aims. By "doing the right thing and walking the right path" with resolute confidence and in a unified way, the people of Taiwan will certainly be able to succeed.

Comment  
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¶6. (S) Contrary to what AIT had been led to believe by Foreign Minister Huang, Chen did not use this speech to "explain" why he is considering abolishing the NUC and NUG. By not addressing the issue directly, Chen doubtlessly hoped to avoid further criticism from the U.S. and from those in Taiwan who have charged him with once again carelessly damaging the all-important relationship with Washington. While Chen did not mention abolishing the NUG, he managed to skirt the issue by referring to the anniversary of the NUG and by arguing that having a preset goal of unification is an undesirable restriction on the right of free choice of the Taiwan people. In recent days, some of Chen's subordinates have argued variously that a recent Legislative Yuan (LY) resolution on abolishing special presidential councils justifies eliminating the NUC, and that a growing PRC military threat changes the status quo, which releases Taiwan from its commitment not to abolish the NUC and NUG. Chen did not touch on the LY issue, and while he described the Chinese military threat in familiar ways, he did not try to draw a connection between the threat and any possible change in Taiwan's commitment not to abolish the NUC and NUG. While Chen's speech may indicate a tactical retreat for the moment, his comments about the need for perseverance and the undesirability of a preset unification goal suggest that he continues to want to abolish the NUG if he can find a safe way to do so.

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